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Air Force Planning High Trial of Officer Over Soviet Contacts

By IRVIN MOLOTSKY

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 12 — The Air Force announced today that it would convene a general court-martial in the case of Second Lieut. Christopher M. Cooke, the missile base officer who has been accused of passing sensitive data to the Soviet Union's Embassy.

An Air Force spokesman said Lieutenant Cooke would be tried on charges of having violated Air Force regulations on three occasions by passing classified information to Soviet personnel and on 11 more occasions by failing to report his contacts with Soviet personnel.

The maximum penalty, on conviction of the first group of charges, is 10 years in prison at hard labor, forfeiture of all pay and allowances and discharge from the Air Force. The maximum penalty on conviction on the second group is two years at hard labor, plus the pay and discharge provisions.

The decision to go ahead with the court-martial came after a formal pre-trial investigation into charges that Lieutenant Cooke, the deputy commander of a Titan nuclear missile crew near McConnell Air Force Base in Kansas, had made the unauthorized visits to the Soviet Embassy here.

Said to Admit Passing Data

The Air Force had announced previously that Lieutenant Cooke, 25 years old, had told investigators he had passed sensitive data concerning the missiles to Soviet diplomats on visits to the embassy between December 1980 and May 1981.

Shortly after his arrest last May 29, the lieutenant was described by his military attorney, Capt. Francis W. Pedrotty, as "cooperating fully" with the Air Force investigation, "under promise of complete immunity." Captain Pedrotty could not be reached immediately for comment tonight, nor could Lieutenant Cooke's civilian lawyer, F. Lee Bailey.

In the past, Lieutenant Cooke's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Richard C. Cooke of Richmond, Va., had charged that the Air Force had "reneged" on its agreement to free the officer in return for full disclosure of what he had passed to the Russians.